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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NOUAKCHOTT 000457

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SUBJECT: MILITARY COUNCIL RESHUFFLES DIPLOMATIC CORPS

Classified By: Amb. Joseph LeBaron, Reasons 1.4 (b),(d)

(U) Key Points

-- In late March the Military Council for Justice and Democracy replaced several of Mauritania's Ambassadors and Consuls to key African and Middle East countries.

-- The military council largely chose diplomats that had held positions of influence in the previous government and ruling party.

(C) Comments

-- To some observers, these choices were a deliberate move by the council to appease this former powerbase, while others believed the council was merely playing it safe by selecting well-known, experienced diplomats.

-- It is also possible that like the former Taya government, the Fal government is using diplomatic appointments to remove potential political opponents from Mauritania, and from its day-to-day operations.

End Key Points and Comments.

¶1. (U) In late March the Military Council for Justice and Democracy replaced several of Mauritania's Ambassadors and Consuls to key African and Middle East countries. The shuffle, which had been expected since the August 3 coup d'etat, surprised many observers in that it drew largely from the former powerbase. Nearly all of the new diplomats are well-known local players who held positions of influence in the previous government and ruling party. While several long-sitting diplomats were removed and given positions in the new government, the new appointments are dominated by former party leaders and government ministers.

¶2. (C) The Ambassadorial changes in alphabetical order of country were as follows:

-- Mohamed Lemine Ould Yahaya, Ambassador to the Arab League

Yahaya, a career diplomat who served as Ambassador to Tunisia and Morocco and was the former Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs under Taya, replaced Sid Mohamed Ould Mohamed Fall, nicknamed "Agurine", the current Secretary General of the former ruling party (now called the Republican Party for Democracy and Revival - PRDR).

-- Mohamed Mahmoud Ould Brahim Khilil, Ambassador to Jordan

Khilil, the former Ambassador to UNESCO who is a member of the same Smacid tribe as former President Taya, replaced Ahmed Jidou Ould Khelifa the former Minister of Education and the Fight Against Illiteracy.

-- Dr Haibetna Ould Sid Haiba, Ambassador to Kuwait

Haiba, the former Minister of Communication and former President of the Nouakchott University replaced Ambassador Othman Ould Cheikh Ahmed Abou El Maali, who became the chairman of PRDR's (the former ruling party) national council.

-- Dr Abdallah Ould Benhmeida, Ambassador to Libya

Benhmeida, a career diplomat and the former Secretary General in the Ministries of Culture and Education replaced Mahjoub Ould Bouya who was appointed to UNESCO in Paris.

-- Sidamine Ould Ahmed Challa, Ambassador to Mali

Challa, the former Secretary General in the Ministry of Energy replaced Col Mohamed Ould Lekhal who had served under Taya as the Minister of Rural Development. Challa is rumored to be a close friend of Malian President Amadou Toumani Toure.

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-- Mohamed Mahmoud Ould Bouya, Ambassador to Saudi Arabia

Bouya, the former Minister of Religious Affairs replaced former Ambassador and Minister Cheikh Ahmed Ould Zehaf, whom the Saudi authorities refused to recognize (reportedly because Zehaf was a Black Moor).

-- Ahmedou Ould Chekh Al Hadrami, Ambassador to Senegal

Hadrami, the former Governor of the Trarza (a Southern region bordering Senegal) replaced Cheikh Saad Bouh Kamara. Hadrami's long tour in the Trarza acquainted him with the various border issues between the two nations, including refugees, migration, and cohabitation between Afro Mauritians and Moors. While knowledgeable on these issues, Hadrami speaks only limited French, noteworthy given that he will be Ambassador to a Francophone country.

-- Mohamed Moctar Ould Nahah, Ambassador to Syria

Nahah, a previous officer in the National Office of Tourism replaced Ahmed Ould Sid Ahmed, who is the current Minister of Foreign Affairs.

-- Al Khadir Ould Ahmed Moloud, Ambassador to Yemen

Moloud, a former Inspector in the Ministry of Education replaced Al Hassen Ould Mohamed Ould Awan the former Minister of Education. Moloud is largely unknown in the diplomatic arena.

13. (C) The consular changes in alphabetical order of country were as follows:

-- Seyedna Ali Ould Jeilany, Consul to Morocco

-- Sid Mohamed Ould Hanena, Consul to Niger

Hanena is the brother of Maj Saleh Ould Hanena, the former leader of the opposition group, Knights of Change.

-- Mohamed Ali Ould Dah, Consul to Senegal
Dah is a former police officer.
LeBaron